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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000446

SIPDIS

OFFICIAL INFORMAL

OFFICIAL INFORMAL FOR EAP/FO DAS MATT DALEY AND EAP/BCLTV  
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TAGS: PGOV BM

SUBJECT: RAZALI'S NEXT VISIT

REF: A. TOKYO 1194  
    B. 02 RANGOON 1479  
    C. RANGOON 433  
    D. KUALA LUMPUR 1064

Classified By: COM CARMEN M. MARTINEZ; REASON 1.5(D).

1.(C) Summary: Reliable sources indicate that Razali's next visit could be delayed until late summer and, as the Special Envoy's tenth trip to Rangoon slips, so does his ability to rescue the political dialogue. On his next visit, Razali must have substantial meetings with the Senior General; he should deliver a formal written message from SYG Annan expressing disappointment with the stalemate in the political dialogue, urging the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, and urging the implementation of effective economic reform efforts; and he must insist on meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi. There is no guarantee that any of these actions will push the SPDC down the path to meaningful political dialogue with the opposition. But they can make it clear to the regime that the "comfort zone" they have established in the region does not extend to the larger international community. The regime must understand that a visible commitment to political dialogue and economic reform is the only way to mitigate international condemnation and address the country's continuing decline. End Summary.

12. (C) The latest word from reliable sources indicates that Razali's next visit will not take place before the very end of April or early May, and could be delayed until late summer. As the Special Envoy's tenth trip to Rangoon slips, so does his ability to rescue the political dialogue from a quagmire of distrust and broken promises. Although Razali received unanimous public statements of support at the February ICG meeting in Tokyo (Ref A, para 5) for continuing his mission, he had little to offer the group in the way of new strategies to move the regime (and particularly Burma's supreme ruler, Senior General Than Shwe) closer to a real political dialogue with the opposition. In addition, since Razali's "face" with the generals is predicated on his relationship with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahatir, he will inevitably lose some of that face as the time draws near for Mahatir to step down from office in October. Signs of Razali's waning prestige with the generals include the insulting few minutes he was given with Than Shwe on his November 2002 visit, and the regime's success in pressuring him to cancel a visit to Aung San Suu Kyi.

13. (C) Razali has been described by those in recent contact with him as variously pessimistic, frustrated, or jaded. He definitely appears to be out of fresh ideas. In a side meeting with the COM and EAP/DAS Daley the morning after the Tokyo ICG, Razali floated the idea of having SYG Annan write a letter to Than Shwe regarding the need for political and economic reform but then asked somewhat helplessly "But then who could deliver it to Than Shwe?" Given that the obvious person to deliver such a letter would be Razali himself, his question reinforced a sense of frustration (and perhaps his naivet), just as when he told the assembled diplomatic corps in November that he had just come to the realization that the agreements with anyone in the regime, including Secretary One Khin Nyunt, meant nothing without the final word by Than Shwe (see Ref B, para 2).

14. (C) It was apparent at the Tokyo ICG that Razali hopes to use Rangoon UNDP's upcoming report on the results of its "Humanitarian Review Exercise" (scheduled for summer release to the GOB, civil society groups, the NLD and other political parties for the consultative process before being finalized) as a tool to break the political stalemate (Ref C, para 6). This confirms recent information received from Razali's assistant (see Ref D, para 5), but raises the concern that the humanitarian issues could be lost in acrimony between the NLD and the SPDC. Razali promoted the idea of strengthening the NLD by including them in development of new humanitarian aid programs and he should press the regime to allow participation by the NLD and civil society organizations in addressing the dire humanitarian needs of the Burmese people. What Razali should not do is insist on making dialogue

between Aung San Suu Kyi and the Senior General/ Secretary One an absolute condition for implementing the recommendations that will arise from the UNDP assessment.

15. (C) We have also heard that Razali has toyed with the idea that 2006 (when Burma takes over the chairmanship of ASEAN) could be used as a target date for possible moves toward some powersharing with the NLD. This is unrealistic - the regime, and most of all, Than Shwe, has no intention of sharing their place in the ASEAN sun with Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD. The regime's active regional diplomacy with its ASEAN partners, China, India, and Bangladesh plainly demonstrates its determination to show that the regime can maintain its power and gain regional acceptance, even legitimization, without any concessions to the democratic opposition.

16. (C) Razali used the Tokyo ICG meeting to exhort the ASEAN members to use their good offices to push the regime to address economic and humanitarian issues, which would in turn impact positively on the political process. We also understand that in contacts with our embassy in Jakarta he floated the idea of approaching the Indonesian government to use their influence on the regime. It seems Razali thinks that perhaps the Indonesians can hold them out as an exemplar of a military government's transition to democracy and convince the SPDC that reforms are necessary. However, we must agree with Jakarta's assessment of Razali's idea - it will have little resonance with the Indonesian military or foreign ministry - just as pressuring the junta for political or economic reform has no resonance with ASEAN as a whole. ASEAN's distaste for pressuring the regime was aptly illustrated at the Tokyo ICG where the Burmese FonMin successfully lobbied ASEAN countries to keep their Rangoon-based ambassadors at home (Ref B).

17. (C) Razali has also expressed interest in a so-called "invitation to dialogue with the U.S." issued by the regime a few days after the Tokyo ICG. Again, this is a misplaced hope. This press statement, in which the regime called on the U.S. to "join us in open, constructive dialogue towards humanitarian, economic and political development," was never an official overture by the junta. In fact, after we saw it in the foreign press, we contacted MOFA, which denied knowledge of the statement. Two days later, the COM spoke personally with Secretary One (General Khin Nyunt), and the Deputy FonMin requesting a formal opportunity to explore the meaning of "invitation to dialogue", and the following week the COM posed the same question to Senior General Than Shwe. The response from all the "decision makers"? A weak smile, a nod, and an evasive "yes, we can discuss it." The only "discussion" of this "invitation to dialogue" has come from SPDC spokesman Col. Hla Min who said what was meant was that the regime was open to more visits by US officials as long as they did not "come to lecture."

18. (C) Comment: What should Razali be aiming at on his tenth visit? The Special Envoy is one of the few arrows that we have in the quiver and the visit could be our last shot, so he must be aimed directly at Senior General Than Shwe. Razali cannot accept a dismissive meeting on the fly as he did on his last visit - he must have substantial meetings with the Senior General. Razali should also deliver a formal written message from SYG Annan expressing disappointment with the stalemate in the political dialogue, urging the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, and urging the implementation of effective economic reform efforts. Razali must also insist on meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi (and not cave in to the Senior General as both he and PM Mahatir have done on their most recent trips). There is no guarantee that any of these actions will push the SPDC down the path to dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi. But they can signal to the regime that the "comfort zone" they have established in the region does not extend to the larger international community. The regime must understand that a visible commitment to political dialogue and economic reform is the only way to mitigate international condemnation and address the country's continuing decline. End Comment.  
Martinez